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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an effort to find ways to respond to the challenges of supporting student and faculty diversity by providing data about the experiences of Latino undergraduates at the University of Michigan. Data were collected from a random sample of 73 Latino undergraduates and a comparison group of 24 non-Latinos. The Latino group represents more than 10 percent of the entire Latino population of 523 undergraduates, who in turn represent only 2.1 percent of the entire student body. Latinos make up 1.1 percent of the faculty. In recent years, only 61 percent of Latino undergraduates have completed their programs within 6 years, in contrast with 77 percent of all Anglos. Questionnaire and focus group information indicates that the majority of Latino students had a relatively strong sense of identification with their ethnic origin. They also felt that their sense of biculturalism had not been validated or recognized by others, and say there is a role for further education of the majority as well as self-help efforts by minority groups. Responses of non-Latino students indicate that they recognize some specific problems and needs related to Latino ethnocentrism. Seven tables present findings. (Contains 38 references.) (SLD)

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Retaining Latino Undergraduates: Lessons from the University of Michigan

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In order to prepare for the 21st century, when our country will become increasingly diverse, many institutions of higher education have begun to examine their approach to the issues of racism and ethnic diversity. New strategies must be developed which support diversity within the student body, faculty and staff of these institutions (Duderstadt, 1988). This will require rethinking current policies and practices within colleges and universities on all levels.

This paper describes an effort to find ways to respond to these challenges by providing some specific data regarding the experiences of Latino undergraduates at the University of Michigan. The data have been collected from a random sample (n= 73) of Latino undergraduates and a comparison group of non-Latinos (n = 24) from all schools within the university. Because the Latino sample is random and constitutes over 10% of the total population (N= 523), results can be generalized to the entire group. Information collected from non-Latinos provides information regarding the degree to which Latinos differ from and are similar to other undergraduates.

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The paper first provides background on the Latino population in the United States and their experiences in higher education. It then describes the major findings from this study regarding the attitudes and experiences of Latino undergraduate students. The final section summarizes these findings and their implications for programs and policies which could encourage the retention of Latino students.

LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES

Latinos, Americans of Latin American descent, are this nation's fastest growing ethnic minority group. Since the 1980 Census the nation's Latino population increased by 30%, in comparison to a growth rate of 5.8% for the rest of the population (Rochin, 1989). It is projected that in the year 2010, Latinos will make up close to 24% of the U.S. population and constitute the largest single minority group (Melville, 1988). Therefore, understanding Latino issues and needs is important for all educational institutions (Quevedo-Garcia, 1987).

Only within the last fifteen years have efforts been made to group people of Latin American descent together under an umbrella ethnic term. This creation of a new ethnic category reflects increasing contacts between different Latino subgroups which led to perceptions of similarity;[1] a recognition that political efforts could be more effective through coalition; and perceptions of non-Latinos of cultural and phenotypic similarities between Latino subgroups (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987; Melville, 1988; Padilla, 1985; Portes & Truelove, 1987; Totti, 1987).

Two labels have been created to define this group: Latinos and Hispanics. Although often used interchangeably they involve different shades of meaning for

[1] Historical and geographical factors have led to the concentration of different Latino groups in different regions. Close to 90% of the Mexican American population is located in the Southwest and California, the majority of Cuban Americans are in Southern Florida, and Puerto Rican migration has centered on the Northeast. Only within the past 15 years has internal migration led to increasing contacts between Latino subgroups (Moore & Pachon, 1985).

members of the group. The term Hispanic has been used primarily by the U.S. government and academicians to classify individuals of Latin American (those areas of the Western Hemisphere originally colonized by the Spanish and Portuguese) or Iberian descent (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987, Moore & Pachon, 1985). In contrast, Latino has traditionally been used within Latin America to denote people from that region (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987). Latino has been the most common term used by the ingroup to describe themselves, while Hispanic was created by the outgroup to define others.[2] This report, therefore, uses the term Latino to describe the population in question.

Research on Latinos has typically analyzed cultural and structural factors separately. Research centered on Latino culture has considered how closely their attitudes, values, and behaviors resemble those of mainstream America. Emphasis has been placed on describing Latino culture and analyzing the degree to which Latinos have *acculturated* (changed their cultural practices) and *assimilated* (participated in larger society) (Gordon, 1964; Padilla & Lindholm, 1983). Some indicators used to measure both acculturation and assimilation include the adoption of new traditions, rates of intermarriage, and acceptance of dominant values (DeVore & Schlesinger, 1981; Gordon, 1964; Keefe & Padilla, 1987). An understanding of the power and status of Latinos is often not a central concern of those who subscribe to this model because it is assumed that Latinos will lose their cultural distinctiveness and sense of ethnic identification (Arce, 1982; De Hoyos, De Hoyos & Anderson, 1986; Mirandé, 1985; Portes, Parker & Cobas, 1980).

An understanding of Latinos from a structural perspective considers how the Latino subgroups have experienced racism and discrimination based on their national

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[2] This does not deny the existence of regional preferences. Latinos on the East Coast and in New Mexico have been more accepting of the term "Hispanic" (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987; Melville, 1988).

origin (Portes, Parker, & Cobas, 1980). Statistics on the status of Latinos support this perspective. The 1980 census data reveals that Latinos lagged behind the rest of the population in terms of median years of education (10.3) and participation in higher education (7% of all Latinos were college educated in contrast with 23% of all Anglos and 12% of all African Americans). Overall Latinos have a marginal economic status, their median income is approximately 75% of the national median income, they are concentrated in the secondary labor market, and their rate of poverty is 29.9%: double the national average (15%) (Moore & Pachon, 1985). [3]

These statistics most accurately represent the experiences of the two major Latino subgroups, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, who together comprise 75% of the total Latino population (Portes & Truelove, 1987). The Cuban subgroup, which makes up 5% of the Latino population, presents a different socio-economic picture.with an educational and economic status equal to the national averages (Nelson & Tienda, 1985; Portes & Truelove, 1987). Very little is known about the "other Latino," population, which is the second largest (20%) and most rapidly expanding Latino subgroup. This heterogeneous grouping includes poor Central American refugees and white collar and professional workers from South America. Depending on their job skills, education, and mode of entry they can either resemble Cubans or the more economically disadvantaged Latino groups (Melville, 1988; Portes & Truelove, 1987).

Despite the differences among them, Latinos have characteristics in common which differentiate them from other ethnic and racial groups in the United States. A shared regional origin in Latin American contributes to certain similarities in language, religion, and cultural practices (Moore & Pachon, 1985; Tienda & Ortiz, 1986; Totti, 1988). These similarities, when perceived by others, have provided a means for

[3] The most recent data on Latinos indicates that their social structural condition has not improved over the past decade (Rochen, 1989).

identifying Latinos and discriminating against them. For the two major subgroups, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, this discrimination has contributed to a low socioeconomic status. Although most Cuban Americans have experienced more economic success, they have also been the targets of similar stereotypes and discrimination. Intergroup conflict based on perceived cultural and racial differences are ways of unifying the Latino experience.

Developing effective educational programs and policies for Latino students would require that attention be paid to the commonalties among Latinos, especially how the Latino experience has been shaped by conditions of powerlessness, discrimination, and oppression, along with the distinctive cultural patterns of each group. These policies would also recognize the diversity within the Latino population and the important differences between Latino subgroups and within each subgroup, paying particular attention to the impact of class differences, recency of migration, and group identification in the creation and resolution of the problems of Latinos.

LATINO ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Latinos make up only 4% of the population of college undergraduates in the United States (Olivas, 1986). Of those who attend college, only 30% graduate - in contrast to 40% of all African Americans and 61% of all Anglos (Gold, 1984). This under-representation and lack of retention of Latinos in higher education has been linked to a number of factors including poverty, cultural beliefs and pratices, low parental education, and the low quality of primary and secondary institutions attended by many Latinos (Fiske, 1988; Poore, 1988; Quevedo-Garcia, 1987). As this issue is quite complex, we can only highlight a few factors found to be associated with the problems Latinos face in institutions of higher education.

Financial problems are a major reason Latinos give for not completing college (Olivas, 1986). As noted previously, the poverty rate of Latinos is double the national

average. Compounding the overall low levels of earnings is the high fertility rate of Latinos, which results in larger families (Gold, 1984). During 1986, Latinas comprised about 8% of the total population of women of childbearing age, yet they gave birth to 12% of the children born in that year (Orfield, 1989). The high fertility rate results in families being less able to provide support for children desiring to attend college. Therefore, financial assistance becomes necessary for most Latinos.

Language issues are also a factor affecting the experience of Latinos in higher education. Although Latino undergraduates are by definition fluent in English, their parents often are not. Therefore, parents may not be able to assist their children in the application to college or through the financial aid process. This creates problems for students who are reliant on their parents to provide continuing financial documentation, especially at those institutions which distribute aid on a "first come, first served" basis (Olivas, 1986).

Conditions within colleges and universities can discourage Latinos from continuing their education. The presence or absence of role models and mentors has been associated with Latinos' academic achievement (Fiske, 1988). As the overall educational level of Latinos is low, Latino students are often first generation college students (Casas & Ponterotto, 1984). The need for someone in their educational environment with whom they can relate to culturally, someone who understands "where they are coming from" when they have difficulties, is very important. Yet there continues to be a lack of Latino role models in higher education. In 1985, only 4% of all faculty in institutions of higher education were Latinos. This figure drops to 1% when only tenured faculty are considered. The majority of these faculty are concentrated in the Romance Languages departments, suggesting that for those students who are not Spanish majors, mentors usually do not exist (Olivas, 1986).

On the program and policy development level, Latinos are also underrepresented. Only 2.7% of the trustees of public educational institutions, and

.03% of the trustees of private institutions are Latinos (Ranbom, 1988). It is difficult for Latinos to make advances in higher education when so few Latinos are in the position to make decisions regarding educational programs and policies. This places lower status Latinos, such as students, staff or untenured faculty, in the position of having to interpret their experiences and needs to those in power (de la Luz Reyes & Halcon, 1988).

Turning to the population in question, to what degree do these problems for Latinos in higher education exist within the University of Michigan? Although Latino enrollment is at an all time high, it constitutes only 2.1% of the entire student body. Data on the retention of Latino undergraduates indicates that they continue to lag behind Anglo students in graduation rates. In recent years, only 61% of all Latino undergraduates completed their program within six years. This is in contrast to 77% of all Anglos, and only marginally better than the graduation rate of African American students (55%) (Affirmative Action Office, 1988). In respect to the presence of Latino faculty, administrators, and staff who can act as mentors and role models, Latinos make up 1.1% of the faculty, .4% of the executives, and 1.3% of the professional staff (Targetted Affirmative Action Program, April 1988)

Recent efforts to address racism at the university have highlighted ways in which all minority students can be negatively affected by present policies and procedures (Eglass, 1988). Most attention, however, as been paid to the condition of education for African Americans. In this respect, Latino students have often described themselves as a "minority with the minority population" at this university (Barboza & Martinez, 1988). Activities on campus and in the larger community in recent years have attempted to rectify this imbalance by presenting administrators with reports and action plans which call for such actions as increasing Latino enrollment, expanding the Latino Studies Program, and hiring more Latino faculty and staff. (CHHE & Hispanic Alumni Council, 1987). A look at the present representation

of Latinos at the university, however, indicates that the goals set were not met (Targetted Affirmative Action Programs, April 1988). These frustrated attempts to achieve equity and change have made some student, and alumni, activists cynical regarding the ability of the institution to respond to the needs of Latino students (Martinez, 1988).

How representative are the voices of Latino student activists? Do their concerns and frustrations correspond with the experience of most Latino students or is theirs a minority view? This paper attempts to answer this question by generating information from a cross section of Latinos in order to understand the way in which the majority of Latino undergraduates experience the institution.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study draws upon three sources of data. From the total population of Latino undergraduates, a sample of 73 students was randomly selected to participate in the study. Fifty participated in focus groups. These groups were co-led by two Latinos, one male and one female from different nationality groups, who focused the discussion on the experience of being a Latino student at the university. During the group session, problems, issues, and solutions were generated and reported. Participants also filled out a 20 page questionnaire on topics relating to ethnicity, the university, and the status of Latinos [4]

[4] A suprising finding was the positive response of participants to the focus group interview. In most cases (75%) they did not know anyone else in the group. Despite the unfamiliar surroundings, these groups were described as supportive and group members and leaders as warm, enthusiastic and accepting. Most indicated that they enjoyed the group discussion and wished that there were more opportunities to interact with other Latinos on campus in this way. One student stated that he enjoyed "discovering that [he was] not alone in [his] feelings and behaviors. Another said that through interaction in the focus group she "got more pride pumped through" her. The most important outcome of the group for many was a sense of belonging. According to one participant the thing he got out of the group was "Learning that I belong here because of my grades, not my ethnicity."

Twenty-three Latino undergraduates completed the same questionnaire, but were not invited to a focus group. This sub-sample allowed us to assess whether participation in a group discussion affected students' interest in becoming involved Latino or minority oriented activities. An additional twenty-four non-Latino students randomly assigned from the psychology subject pool, filled out the same measures. This group allowed us to make comparisons between Latino and non-Latino students on these topics.

This multimethod study generated both qualitative data from the focus groups and quantitative data from the questionnaires. The qualitative data is a good source of information regarding some of the ideas students may have regarding their specific needs and ways in which the university can begin to meet them (Kreuger, 1988). The quantitative data provides a means to use statistics to get a better picture of Latino students and to make comparisons within the Latino group and between Latinos and non-Latinos. Because this is a random sample, results from these statistical analyses can be generalized to the larger Latino undergraduate population.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics:

Seventy-three Latinos and 24 non-Latinos participated in the study. Table One describes the total sample, and each subgroup, in regards to a number of different demographic characteristics. Latinos and non-Latinos were similar on some descriptive characteristics. Both groups were composed of almost equal numbers of men and women, the average age was 19 and most were in their freshman or sophomore years. The two groups differed in terms of nativity, major, language use, and ethnic origin. Latinos were much more likely to have been foreign born, to have grown up speaking a language other than English, to have selected a major, and to be

of non-European origin than non-Latinos. All of these differences are significant at the 1% level.

Table One:

Sample Characteristics: Latinos and Non-Latinos

Characteristic	Latinos	Non-Latinos
Gender		
Male	48%	50%
Female	52%	50%
Nativity*		
U.S.	78%	83%
Foreign[5]	22%	17%
Major*		
LS&A	49%	38%
Undecided	18%	38%
Professional	30%	17%
Arts	3%	8%
First Language*		
English	60%	88%
Spanish	37%	---
Other	3%	12%
Ethnic Origin*		
Latin American[6]	88%	---
European	7%	58%
Asian	---	21%
African-American	--	4%
Native American	3%	4%
Middle Eastern	1%	---
North American	1%	13%
Mixed Ethnicity*[7]	56%	42%

*These differences are significant at the .01 level

[5]The majority of the Latino foreign born were born in Latin America, the majority of the non-Latino foreign born were born in Asia.

[6] All major Latin American groups were represented: 34% were Mexican origin, 18% S. American, 7% Puerto Rican, 6% Central American, 4% Cuban, and 19% "Hispanic."

[7] The majority of Latinos of mixed ethnic background were racially mixed: Latino/Anglo, Latino/Black, Latino/Native American. This is in contrast to the non-Latinos who were mostly of different white European groups (eg. Irish/Italian).

Perceptions of Latino Identity:

One area of concern in this study was the topic of ethnic identity. A reason posited for the observation that Latinos do not fully participate in ethnic minority events is the lack of a sense of Latino identity. Although over 50% of the Latino participants described themselves as descending from more than one ethnic or racial group, 72% indicated that they identified primarily with their Latino heritage. Over 80% of all Latino participants indicated on the questionnaires that their Latino ethnicity was of some importance to them. These data also indicated that Latinos identified equally with the label Latino and Hispanic.

Ethnic identification was also explored in the focus groups through discussion of what it means to be Latino. Participants generated a list of similarities ranging from a common language (Spanish) to the more expressive works of art emerging from the Latino culture. Three commonalties expressed in most groups were the perceptions that Latinos are generally more expressive people, have much ethnic and cultural pride, and have the advantage of a bicultural outlook on life. Biculturalism was emphasized as an advantage because it enabled them to relate to other cultures. Other similarities brought out were a respect for elders, an acceptance of others, and extended family networks.

A list of differences among Latinos was also generated. Examples of differences discussed include reasons for immigration/migration to the United States, different geographic origins, and differences in socioeconomic background. No one difference was emphasized or mentioned more frequently than the others. Although these differences were recognized, participants did not feel that they would necessarily interfere with the ability of Latinos to work together. These results do not support the perception that Latino students do not identify with their ethnic heritage.

Problems and Issues of Latino Students:

A second area of study was the perception of problems and issues of Latino students. This topic was explored both in the questionnaires and in the focus groups. All participants responded to an item on the questionnaire in which they were asked to indicate the "most important problem" facing Latino students. These responses were then coded into larger categories. Responses to this item are in Table Two.

Table Two:

Most Important Problem of Latino Students*

Problem	Latinos	Non-Latinos
Prejudice	24%	---
Racism/Ethno-centrism	21%	57%
Lack of Cohesiveness	18%	5%
Invisibility	3%	5%
Economic	3%	---
Cultural Adaption/Language	6%	---
Loss of ethnicity	5%	---
Academic	3%	10%
Apathy	2%	---
Too few Latinos	---	10%
Other	8%	10%

* $p < .01$

These data indicate that Latino and non-Latino students look upon the problems of Latinos differently. When asked to indicate the "most important" problem faced by Latino students the most common responses among Latinos were Prejudice (24%), Racism/Ethno-centrism (21%) and Lack of Cohesiveness among Latinos (18%). Non-Latinos overwhelmingly indicated that that they believed that Racism/Ethno-centrism (57%) was the biggest problem. When citing racism as a problem for Latinos, one non-Latino respondent indicated that the university as a whole needs to "realize that Blacks are not the only race being discriminated against." As a group, Latinos were more likely than non-Latinos to mention many more different kinds of problems. This can be attributed to their greater level of familiarity with the Latino experience at the university.

Findings from the focus group interviews were similar. Participants agreed that the three major problems faced by Latinos are: ethno-centrism and stereotyping, difficulties with immigration/migration and adjustment to a different culture, and a lack of cohesiveness among different Latino groups on campus and throughout the United States.

The presence of ethno-centrism within the university was felt acutely by these students. Many described themselves as experiencing pressure to "assimilate" and conform to anglo society. They felt that this represented a lack of understanding on the part of many that Latino identity can be a central part of one's experience. As described by one student: "[being Latino] is in my heart and in my head, it is something I can not be myself without!" These experiences prevented many participants from feeling fully integrated into university life.

The lack of cohesiveness among Latinos and the corresponding isolation of Latino students from one another was another major theme. One Latino student suggested that there was an "inability [for Latinos] to find each other and come together." This seems to result in part from the phenotypic diversity among Latinos which makes it difficult for them to identify one another visually. The very small number of Latinos also contributes to this as they are scattered throughout the campus. For many of the participants, the focus group was one of the few environments in which they had interacted with other Latinos.

Suggestions for Programs and Policies:

A third major area of analysis was the identification of specific programs and policies which could address the problems faced by Latinos. These suggestions provide useful information regarding how students feel these issues should be addressed. Responses to the questionnaire found some non-significant differences between Latinos and non-Latinos (Table Three). Both groups selected Education as

the best strategy for solving these problems. The majority of the education efforts involved making students, faculty, and administrators more aware of the presence and problems or Latinos on campus. Latinos were more likely to suggest self help strategies, such as study groups, and more University programs specifically for Latinos. Non-Latino respondents more often described the presence of more Latinos, or political organizing, as possible solutions. As described by one non-Latino respondent: "Latino organizations should be more outspoken in order to gain recognition from students, staff, and administrators."

Table Three:

Methods for Dealing with Problems of Latinos:

Method	Latinos	Non-Latinos
Educate Others	36%	59%
Self Help	20%	---
More Latinos	11%	14%
More Programs	12%	---
Acculturation	5%	---
Financial Assistance	5%	4%
Political Organizing	3%	9%
Other	5%	14%
Nothing	3%	---

Note: These differences are not significant

Participants in the focus groups generated similar suggestions. The most common solution was to educate people so that they are aware of "where we, as Latinos, are coming form." Forms of education suggested by the groups ranged from having rallies and campaigns for the purpose of bringing Latino issues to the forefront, to showing Latino films or instituting a weekly "Salsa Night" at the student union.

As in the questionnaire, participants in the focus groups generated ideas for self help efforts. One specific suggestion offered to overcome feelings of isolation on campus was the formation of support groups which would meet periodically. Other

suggestions included offering a special event at orientation or scheduled early in the fall semester specifically for new Latino students or forming study groups for Latinos. It was also recommended that Latino student organizations engage in more assertive outreach - such as personal phone calls - to recruit new members.

Respondents were also asked to indicate who they felt was responsible for implementing these changes. Table Four summarizes responses to that open ended question. Over 50% of the Latino students suggested that Latinos and university administrators were the most responsible for making changes to improve the Latino experience. This is in contrast to the non-Latinos, who were the most likely to indicate that "everyone" in the university community was responsible. This suggests that non-Latinos may perceive themselves as responsible and willing to take a role in working to benefit Latino students.

Table Four

Responsible Party	**Latinos**	**Non-Latinos**
Latinos	27%	10%
Administration	25%	16%
Everyone	14%	37%
Students	8%	---
Faculty	6%	11%
President Duderstadt	5%	---
Families	3%	---
Society	2%	---
Federal Government	2%	10%
Other	8%	16%

Note: These differences are not significant

A related set of items looked at attitudes toward the university administration (Table Five). No significant differences were found between Latinos and non-Latinos. For the most part all respondents perceived the administration as uncaring, out of touch with student concerns, and uninterested in students' ideas. However, respondents were neutral on the item regarding their ability to have input on the

policy process. This suggests that most students may be skeptical regarding the ability of the administration to develop programs to improve the situation of Latinos.

Table Five

Attitudes toward the University Administration

Attitude	Latinos	Non-Latinos
People like me have no say	3.07	3.33
UM cares about people like me	3.32	3.45
Administrators lose touch	2.08	2.25
UM pays attention to my ideas	3.47	3.29
I can trust the UM	3.36	3.16

Note: scale in which 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree

Degree of interest in specific program activities

A final focus was on participation and interest in student activities. Respondents were asked to list different activities in which they were involved and to rate their level of involvement overall. Results are in Table Six.

Table Six:

Participation in Student Activities:*

Type of Activity	Latinos	Non-Latinos
Latino/Minority	17%	10%
Pre-Professional/Academic	17%	---
Sports	15%	10%
Greek	11%	30%
Dorm	9%	---
Media	6%	---
Religious	5%	---
Military	4%	15%
Community Service	4%	5%
Arts	4%	10%
Political	4%	---
Other	4%	---

*$p < .05$

Most participants described themselves as "somewhat involved" in student activities. Latino participants were active in student activities in general, with 56% listing more than one activity in which they were involved

Differences emerged when considering the types of activities listed. Latino students were more likely to list involvement in Latino or Minority oriented activities, in pre-professional or academically oriented activities, or in sports. This contradicts the perception that minority students do not participate in non-minority oriented activities (Barol, et.al.,1983). In fact, most (69%) described themselves as not very involved in Latino activities. More non-Latinos listed activities related to the greek system, military activities, and arts oriented activities. These differences were significant at the 5% level. This suggests that different patterns of student participation exist for these two groups.

All participants also indicated their degree of interest in specific activities related to the Latino community (Table Seven).

Table Seven:

Interest in Activity Scales

Type of Activity	Latinos	Non-Latinos
Talk on Latino History	2.91	2.86
Talk on a specific group**	3.43	2.91
Salsa Concert	3.26	2.86
Folklorico Dancers	3.10	2.78
Tutoring Latinos	3.13	2.95
Picketing for the UFW	1.86	2.00
Recruiting Latino students	3.32	2.65
Meeting to plan events	3.06	2.13
Demonstrating for faculty	2.30	2.08
Orienting Latinos**	3.70	3.08

$p < .05$

Note: Scale 1 = not interested, 3 = interested, 5 = very interested

Respondents were the most interested in cultural activities such as a talk on Latino history, a Salsa Concert, or Folklorico Dancers. They were least interested in forms of social action such as picketing for the United Farm Workers or demonstrating for

more Latino faculty. Latino students were more likely than non-Latinos to indicate interest in most of these activities, but in most cases these differences were not significant. This suggests that non-Latino students would be interested in participating in Latino oriented programming.

Another measure of interest in participation was more direct. All participants were given a form to complete if they were interested in being contacted by Latino oriented organizations. When given the opportunity, 17% of all non-Latinos and 57% of all Latino participants filled out this form. The specific organizations they were the most interested in were the Socially Active Latino Students Association (SALSA) and the Council for Hispanics in Higher Education (CHHE).

Effects of the Focus Groups

Studies have noted that involvement in minority student organizations can facilitate the retention of minority students (Carr & Chittum, 1979) therefore, we were interested in finding out if participation in a group discussion would encourage student involvement. Interacting with other Latinos in a group seemed to have a positive effect on an interest in these activities. Of those who attended the group sessions, 60% filled out the forms indicating their interest in being contacted by Latino organizations, whereas only 30% of those who did not attend groups filled them out. Those Latinos who attended groups also showed more interest in activities to improve the status of Latinos on campus, such as tutoring Latino high school students, helping to recruit Latinos to the UM, and orienting Latinos to college (Gutiérrez, 1990). This suggests that the kind of group meeting conducted could play a role in increasing participation in Latino activities.[8]

[8]Only Latinos attended the focus group interviews, therefore it is not possible to evaluate this effect for the non-Latino respondents.

Summary of Results:

A major purpose of this study was to determine how the "average" Latino experiences the university and whether this experience could have a negative academic impact. A second question was the degree to which the voices of Latino activists represent that of the relatively silent Latino majority. These results suggest some areas of convergence, and also some differences between the "average" Latino and his or her activist counterparts.

The majority of the Latinos in this study were born in the USA, were in the liberal arts school, were English language dominant, were Mexican-American, and attending their first two years at the university. Although they were primarily native to the US, they described a relatively strong sense of identification with their ethnic origin, even in the cases of those who were of mixed ethnic background. In the focus groups many described themselves as "bicultural:" having been socialized to live in both the Latino and mainstream "American" worlds.

When discussing their negative experiences at the university, it appeared that this sense of biculturalism has not been validated or recognized by others. Students described great pressure to conform and give up "foreign" values or ways of doing things in order to gain social acceptance. They describe this experience as ethnocentrism: the inability of Anglo-Americans to perceive any culture but their own as acceptable. This experience only exacerbates the isolation and lack of cohesiveness between Latinos which were also discussed.

Respondents felt that community education regarding the presence of Latinos in the United States, and world wide, as the best way of attacking this problem. They also felt that self help efforts, such as developing study groups or support groups in which Latino students could begin to connect and learn more about themselves and each other could both reduce isolation and act as a means for organizing further activities. They saw Latinos and administrators as taking critical roles in this process.

These results suggest that many of the Latino students do see themselves as a distinct group on campus with unique problems and needs. Like the Latino activists, they feel as if these needs are not being adequately met, primarily because of the small number of Latinos and the lack of recognition of the presence of Latin American cultures in the United States. Like most students, they are unconvinced that the university administration has a commitment to rectifying this situation However, this group diverges from the perspective of most Latino activists in the kinds of solutions they present for this situation. Their interest is in programs and policies which would be focused on ways of increasing the "Latino Presence" through community education, cultural activities, social events, and self help efforts. A high priority was placed on community building efforts among Latinos, from which these other activities could emerge. The positive response of the participants to the focus group discussions suggest that these groups could be one tool for community building which could asses the needs of Latinos, initiate contacts between students, and encourage future participation.

One challenge for building diversity within colleges and universities is to develop a climate in which efforts to benefit one group are not seen as taking resources from another. Data from the non-Latino respondents suggested that they saw Latinos as having some specific problems and needs related to ethno-centrism and that they would support efforts to deal with these issues. In fact, many non-Latino students expressed an interest in attending Latino cultural events and helping to orient Latino students. This suggests that non-Latino students can be included in these programs and efforts to create a multi-cultural institution (see Gilbert, 1989, for one innovative approach).

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